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ABSTRACT

This study compared how Taiwanese and U.S. graduate students at one U.S. university made e-mail requests to professors. Taiwanese students had received formal English education in Taiwan but none in the United States. All participants provided several e-mails containing requests to their professors. E-mail data were divided into high-imposition and low-imposition requests. The study involved a distribution analysis of the general textual features of openings and closings and a detailed intertextual analysis of the requests. Opening features included formal address terms, salutations, self-introduction, and greetings. Closing features included thanks and complimentary closings. The three request types were requesting an appointment for course-related advice or information with a professor known to the student, requesting a recommendation from a professor the student has taken a course with, and requesting a special consideration or arrangement from a professor the student knows only by name. Taiwanese students used different, culturally influenced discourse strategies than U.S. students when structuring their e-mail requests. Students varied their choice of strategies according to their perception of the power relation with the professor, familiarity with the professor, and the purpose and imposition level of the request. (Contains 42 references.) (SM)

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Making E-mail Requests to Professors: Taiwanese vs. American Students

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Paper presented at 2001 AAAL Conference, St. Louis

Abstract: This study analyzes and compares how requests are made to professors in e-mail by Taiwanese overseas students and American students. The purpose is to identify the requesting strategies employed by these two particular cultural groups making institutional requests in the academic context through e-mail communication; also, the strategies are interpreted and explained from culture-specific notions of politeness and students' socio-cultural identities reflected in their e-mails. This comparative analysis is conducted by examining general e-mail textual features of the openings and closings, information sequencing of requestive events, linguistic realizations of requestive acts, and discourse style of requests demonstrated in the institutional e-mail requests.

Introduction

E-mail is now a widely and frequently used interpersonal communication medium. It functions midway between the telephone call and the conventional letter; hence, it inherits many features of conversational language as well as features of written language from letters. In fact, e-mail constitutes a unique, hybrid type of text, and this hybridity also allows its users to display a wide range of discourse styles in e-mail when used in different contexts and for various communicative purposes. This study chose to focus on the discourse style of a specific type of e-mail that is used by students to make institutional requests to professors in the university context. Making requests to professors through e-mail has become a common institutional discourse practice for students; for example, they often use e-mail to request appointments, advice, course-related information, and recommendations. However, since professors are in positions of authority at universities, how students perceive the power relations with them will affect the discourse style of their e-mail requests. In addition, the request content and the imposition level upon professors also determine what discourse strategies they will use to compose their request messages.

For nonnative students, there are more factors that will affect their choices of discourse strategies in making requests to professors in e-mail. One very important factor is their native language culture. Their cultural knowledge, on the one hand, will probably influence their

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perception of the role/status of professors and their social relations with professors; on the other hand, it will likely affect their use of requesting strategies in terms of politeness values and discourse organization. Therefore, nonnative students are likely to compose their e-mail requests to professors in different ways from native speakers. In order to find out the differences in discourse style by nonnative and native speakers, this study compares the discourse strategies used in such e-mail requests by Taiwanese overseas students and American students. The purpose of this study is two-fold: 1) to describe different requesting strategies and discourse styles demonstrated in these two particular cultural groups' e-mail requests by analyzing general e-mail textual features, information sequencing of requestive events, linguistic realizations of requestive acts, and discourse styles of requests; and 2) to interpret and explain these textual differences from the perspectives of social identities, social relations, and cultural knowledge of politeness and rhetoric strategies.

Literature Review

Theoretical Background – Requests and Politeness

Requesting behavior, according to Searle's (1979) classification system of speech acts, falls into the directives, the function of which is that the speaker attempts to get the hearer to do something by means of what he says. It is also regarded as a face-threatening act (FTA), in Brown & Levinson's terms (1987), which involves risk to either the speaker's or the hearer's face. According to their politeness theory, face can be divided into two opposite aspects – positive and negative face. Positive face concerns the desire to be appreciated and approved of by others, while negative face concerns a person's wants to be unimpeded and free from imposition. Making a request, accordingly, threatens the hearer's negative face, for the speaker is impeding the hearer's freedom by asking the hearer not to do what s/he wants but rather do what the speaker wants. The speaker's task is, therefore, to minimize the threat to the hearer's negative face while at the same time pursuing his/her request goal. In order to save the hearer's face and also to get the hearer's compliance with a request, the speaker exploits a number of politeness strategies to "counteract the potential face damage of the FTA" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, P. 69). In this view, politeness is basically a function of redressive action.

Brown & Levinson (1987) divide politeness strategies into two types: positive and

negative politeness strategies. Positive politeness strategies are "approach-based", aiming to satisfy the addressee's wants and enhance his/her self-image. They are grouped into three categories: 1) claiming common ground by building in-group membership, intensifying interest to H, or seeking agreement; 2) conveying that S (the speaker/writer) and H (the hearer/reader) are cooperators by claiming reflexivity and reciprocity; and 3) fulfilling H's want for some X by giving gifts (goods, sympathy, understanding) to H (p. 129). On the other hand, negative politeness strategies are "avoidance-based", aiming not to impede or interfere with the addressee's freedom of action. They are grouped into four categories (not including 'on-record' strategies): 1) making minimal assumptions about H's wants; 2) giving H option not to do act and minimizing threat; 3) communicating S's want to not impinge on H; and 4) redressing other wants of H's (p. 131). Several other terms, by more emphasizing the aspect of social interactions, have been used in the sociolinguistic literature for these two types of politeness. Positive politeness has been called solidarity or involvement politeness, while negative politeness has been called deference or independence politeness (Scollon & Scollon, 1995).

The notion of politeness is often associated with indirectness. It has been claimed that the degree of indirectness in requests is closely related to politeness. Indirectness, according to Searle (1975), is manifested when locutionary sense and illocutionary force of an utterance do not match; that is, there is a discrepancy between the speaker's intention and the literal sentence meaning in his/her utterances. Therefore, using indirect requests helps to diminish the illocutionary force of requesting and thus minimize the threat to the hearer's face. Moreover, as Brown & Levinson claims, the choice of indirectness is influence by the seriousness of an FTA, which is determined by the three sociological variables – relative power, social distance, and imposition ranking. The more serious an FTA is, the more indirect the FTA needs to be. As a general rule, the more indirectly a request is realized, the more polite it is (Leech, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Empirical Studies on Politeness & Indirectness – English vs. Chinese

The empirical studies on politeness and indirectness, however, found that the order of politeness level is not exactly the same as the order of indirectness level in some languages (e.g., Blum-Kulka, 1987; Takahashi, 1993; Weizman, 1993). For example, Blum-Kulka (1987) points out that in English politeness and indirectness are associated with each other only in the case of conventional indirectness (query preparatory), but not in the case of non-conventional indirectness (hints). Internal modification features (lexical or syntactical downgraders) are often used in native

English speakers' requests to minimize the impositive force of the requestive act (Blum-Kulka, 1987; Cenoz, 1996; Eslamirasekh, 1993; Faerch & Kasper, 1989). Therefore, the original rule indicating the one-to-one relationship between politeness and indirectness needs to be reconsidered.

Chinese politeness is largely different in its manifestation from English politeness. Although Chinese, like English, also uses the interrogative structure (Query Preparatory) as the main strategy for a polite requestive act in individual utterances (Shih, 1986; Zhang, 1995), Chinese politeness is achieved mainly through the use of pre-posed supportive moves in which several other speech acts are employed to convey request intentions, such as giving reasons, complimenting, apologizing, showing concerns or appreciation (Huang, 1993; Kirkpatrick, 1991; Nash, 1983; Zhang, 1995). English native speakers, though they also use supportive moves, do not necessarily put them prior to the requestive act, nor do they use supportive moves as a "mandatory" choice as Chinese native speakers do (Zhang, 1995). Faerch & Kasper (1989) found that internal modification was an obligatory choice for English requests, while external modification was optional. In contrast, for Chinese native speakers, the rule of using internal and external modification is opposite. In Chinese, using pre-request supportive moves shows the speaker's respect and consideration for the hearer; if a request is made directly and immediately, it is perceived rude and not thoughtful (Gu, 1990; Zhang, 1995).

In other words, Chinese indirectness in polite requests is manifested at the discourse level, through a series of supportive moves, rather than syntactic structures at the sentence level. The literature shows that among all pre-request supportive moves used in Chinese conversational requests, grounders, i.e., justification-giving (Zhang, 1995), and complimenting or "gift-giving" (Nash, 1983) are the two most often used strategies. Another evidence that shows Chinese native speakers prefer to use pre-posed supportive moves is a unique discourse organizational pattern demonstrated in written requests. Kirkpatrick (1991), after analyzing the structure of 40 Chinese letters of requests written to the China Section of Radio Australia, found that there was a distinctive structure: "Salutation – Preamble (facework) – Reasons for request – Request." He concluded that Chinese indirectness and politeness is established through "because…therefore" sequence rather than "therefore…because" structure. Such a delayed introduction of the purpose is usually a Chinese rhetoric strategy. The indirect, inductive way of requesting in Chinese, by means of a series of pre-request supportive moves, is particularly noteworthy in Chinese

politeness.

Studies on E-mail Discourse and Requesting strategies

E-mail has become a popular interpersonal communication medium, and the discourse of e-mail displays characteristics of both spoken and written language. With its hybrid form, various discourse strategies that have been employed in oral and written communication are manifested in e-mail communication as well (Gains, 1999; Herring, 1996). Several studies have been conducted to investigate how L2 learners compose e-mail messages in terms of communication strategies and discourse styles (Chapman 1997; Gonzalez-Bueno, 1998; Hartford & Bradovi-Harlig 1996; Liaw 1996). Among these studies, Hartford & Bradovi-Harlig's study (1996) particularly focused on e-mail requests written by L1 and L2 college students to faculty, and their analysis was from professors' perspectives. They found that nonnative speakers used fewer downgraders in their requests with negative impact, mentioned personal time needs more often, and acknowledged imposition on the faculty members less often than native speakers; thus, their requests were considered less effective than those written by native speakers. They concluded that, in students' e-mail requests, acknowledgement of the imposition, downgrading the requests with mitigators, and generally allowing room for negotiation were better strategies in achieving requestive goals.

Social Identity and Language

Language functions as a salient marker of social and cultural identity, as Gumperz and Cook-Cumperz points out, "Social identity and ethnicity are in large part established and maintained through language" (1982, P. 7). Language is used based on an individual's in-group membership and therefore indicates his/her social identity (Giles & Johnson, 1987; Hansen & Liu, 1997). How second language learners practice the target language also derives from the construction of their own linguistic and cultural identities. Often times their deviation in language use from the norms of the target language does not necessarily relegate them to defective communicators, but just reflect their multiple identities through specific discourse styles (Gebhard, 1999). As Beebe (1988) notes, L2 learners may choose not to be native-like "because they may find that the reward of being fluent in the target language is not worth the cost in lost identification and solidarity with their own native language group" (p. 63). A similar view, claimed by Blum-Kulka (1991), was that nonnative-like pragmatic behavior displayed by highly proficient long-term nonnative residents might be viewed as a sign of "disidentification" with the target community, rather

than as deficient L2 pragmatic competence. It is, therefore, L2 learners' social and cultural identities that determine their language use in L2, and in turn, their language use also serves as a catalyst for expressing their thoughts and experiences unique to the non-native speakers and reflects their unique social and cultural identities.

Method

Data Collection

The e-mail data were collected from two groups of graduate students at SUNY Albany: 1) 30 Taiwanese students (TS) who were in their first semester in the U.S. enrolling in diverse academic programs; and 2) 25 American students (AS) studying in the Educational Theory and Practice Department with various specializations. The TS group had received formal EFL education in Taiwan for at least seven years (six years of high school English and one year of freshman English at college) before coming to the U.S. They were invited to participate in this study particularly because they were all newly arriving students in the U.S. and they had no previous schooling in the U.S. This suggested that the language they used in e-mail was more influenced by their EFL instruction in Taiwan than by their American cultural and social experience.

All participating students were asked to provide me with two or three e-mails containing requests written to their professors for academic purposes. Totally 60 e-mail requests were collected from the TS group and 54 from the AS group. The TS group's e-mail requests were written in the first semester of their graduate studies (from August to December 1999), while the AS group's e-mail requests were written in the second semester (from January to May 2000). All the students' participation in this study was voluntary and all the e-mails were obtained with consent.

The e-mail data were first divided into two categories – high-imposition and low-imposition requests, according to the request purpose shown in the e-mails. By following the guidelines for rating imposition of academic requests suggested by Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig (1996), high-imposition requests included those asking for bending rules (e.g., reconsidering the admission to a program and giving a special arrangement to suit a student's personal need), asking for making decisions on serious matters (e.g., being a student's thesis advisor and giving a permission for course/tuition waivers), and asking for extra work or time on the part of professors

(e.g., writing a recommendation and answering long and complicated questions). On the other hand, low-imposition requests included those asking for routine institutional information (e.g., telling about department/program regulations, answering short and simple questions, and telling course grades), asking for reference books or articles, and asking for appointments or responses which do not require much preparation on the part of professors (e.g., giving course advisement and giving advice for exam/paper preparation). In addition to imposition level, each e-mail was also rated as high-distance and low-distance requests based on the students' familiarity to professors that they wrote requests to. If a request was written to a professor that the student had not contacted before, it was coded as high-distance; otherwise, it was coded as low-distance, indicating that the student had met the professor and knew him or her to some extent. Therefore, the e-mail data were grouped into four types of requests: 1) low-imposition and low-distance, 2) low-imposition and high-distance, 3) high-imposition and low-distance, and 4) high-imposition and high-distance. However, the AS data collected here did not contain many e-mails written to professors that the students had not contacted before (i.e., high-distance requests), and when this case happened, the e-mails were found to involve high-imposition requests. There were, hence, no AS data found for the type of low-imposition and high-distance requests; the comparison between the TS and AS e-mails could be drawn only in the other three types.

Data Analysis

Two kinds of analyses were conducted in this study: first, a distribution analysis of general e-mail textual features of openings and closings, and second, a detailed intertextual analysis of requestive events. The distribution analysis aims to compare the TS and AS data in respect to the use of address terms, epistolary conventions (salutation and complimentary close), opening moves (self-introduction, conversational phatic communication) and closing moves (thanks).

For the intertextual analysis of requestive events, I chose three common academic request types and selected two samples for each type from the TS and AS e-mail data. The three types of academic requests are ordered from the least serious requestive events to the most serious ones: 1) requesting an appointment for course-related advice or information with a professor known to the student (low-imposition and low-distance); 2) requesting a recommendation from a professor that the student has taken a course with before (high-imposition and low-distance); and 3) requesting a special consideration or arrangement from a professor that the student knows by name only

(high-imposition and high-distance). The intertextual analysis will focus on the use of a combination of speech acts as supportive moves, various genre types with regard to discourse organization, and request perspectives as well. The finding of the textual analysis will then be interpreted and explained from culture-specific notions of politeness and students' socio-cultural identities reflected in their e-mails.

Distribution Analysis of General E-mail Textual Features

Openings

The e-mail opening features that I would like to examine include formal address terms, salutations, self-introduction and greetings. Table 1 presents the distributions of these features found in the TS and AS data.

1. Address terms

It is notable that all the TS data contained a formal address term (title + last name) to name the professor. This finding indicates that the Taiwanese students, even though they were addressing to their U.S. professors, observed the "Chinese Address Maxim" (Gu, 1990), which emphasizes the use of title properly in communication to show respectfulness. In the Chinese society, people never attempt to address a higher-status individual by his/her given name even if they are very close to each other. The act of addressing for Chinese reflects a hierarchical relation between the addresser and the addressee and it shapes their social status or roles as well. The Address Maxim is an indispensable element of Chinese linguistic politeness. As Gu claims, "a failure to use an appropriate address term is a sign of rudeness, or a signal of a breakdown of established social order" (p. 249).

In contrast, Americans generally do not emphasize the use of title among the participants who know each other well, even in unequal encounters. Duranti (1986) note that the particular ways students addressed their professors in e-mail demonstrated the tension between power and solidarity. He also found that many American students used the professors' first names in e-mail to signal solidarity, which was evidenced in the AS data as well. When the professor's first name was used, it helped to shorten the distance and lessen the status difference between student and professor. The use of the first-name strategy was also associated with an informal, conversational tone conveyed in the message, indicating a relatively friendly, close relation with the professor

(see Sample 4 & 8 below). On the other hand, when the request was written to a professor that the student was not familiar with, a formal address term was used and the tone of language in the e-mail tended to be more formal as well (see Sample 11 &12 below). Therefore, we can conclude that, for the Taiwanese students, under the influence of the Chinese Address Maxim, the use of professors' titles and last names to show respect to an institutionally higher-status role was normative, whereas for the American students, the use of address terms became strategic in that they used titles and last names to show deference politeness but first names to show solidarity politeness.

Table 1. Textual features of e-mail openings

	TS data (60 e-mails)		AS data (54 e-mails)	
	N of e-mails	%	N of e-mails	%
Formal address term *(title + last name)*	60	100%	33	61%
Salutation *(Dear...)*	50	83%	14	26%
Self-introduction				
1) name only *(This is xxx)*	7	12%	0	0%
2) (name) & background information	29	48%	5	9%
Phatic communication *(e.g., How are you? Happy New Year!)*	11	18%	9	17%

2. Salutation

The salutation ('*Dear...*') occurred in 83% of the TS data but in only 26% of the AS data (the other e-mails started with either 'Hi' or no salutation). This finding indicates that the Taiwanese students tended to regard the form of e-mail similar to that of conventional letters by following epistolary conventions (also see the use of complimentary close on p.). More interestingly, the remaining 17% of the TS data that did not contain '*Dear...*' were all short, low-imposition, and low-distance requests, which suggests that their use of the salutation was not just influenced by epistolary conventions but also affected by the situational factors in the request: imposition and distance. The use of salutation, hence, became a deference politeness strategy for them; it was used especially when the FTA was more serious. For the American students, on the other hand, they generally did not use the salutation in e-mail. When this form was used, it

seemed to be an idiosyncratic, rather than a strategic choice. In other words, whether to use this epistolary form depended on personal preference and did not seem to enhance or impair politeness value in their e-mail requests.

3. Self-introduction

It is interesting to note that, in the body of the e-mail messages, 60% of the TS data started with self-introduction, among which 48% contained the student's name as well as his/her background information including the program or course he/she was currently in and/or nationality. In contrast, only 9% of the AS data contained this type of self-introduction. Self-introduction is normally given when the addresser meets the addressee for the first time because they do not know each other. This was the case for the three AS e-mails involving self-introduction where the students wrote requests to the professors who were not teaching at SUNY Albany and did not know the students (see Sample 12). However, the reasons for the Taiwanese students to introduce themselves as an opening move seemed to be more complicated than that.

An obvious reason for them to give self-introduction was that they were all newly admitted students and most professors probably did not know them well. The emphasis on their names, nationalities and especially on their 'new student' status (e.g., '*This is K.C. from Taiwan, a new international graduate student in the department of education*' in Sample 10) not only let the professors know more about the students' background but also seemed to give the students a legitimate reason or right for making certain requests such as asking for course-related information, requesting an appointment with the professor for course advisement (see Sample 1), and requesting special considerations or arrangements (see Sample 9 & 10). In addition, they also introduced themselves to the professors they already knew when making more onerous requests such as asking the professors to write recommendations for them (Sample 5 and 6). By giving such self-introduction, their non-native, marginalized, newcomer identity was explicitly constructed, which might be helpful for them to get more attention from the professors and thus achieve their requestive goals more easily. Therefore, the use of self-introduction, on the one hand, reflected their socio-cultural identity, but on the other hand, this manifested self identity became a strategic use for them particularly to make high-imposition, high-distance requests.

4. Phatic Communication

Another opening move demonstrated in both TS and AS e-mail data is conversational

phatic inquiries (e.g., *'How are you?'*) or seasonal greetings (*'Happy Thanksgiving!'*) to show personal care and concern. This opening move was found in 18% of TS data and 17% of AS data. Moreover, it occurred only when the students were familiar with the professors and was used as a strategy for solidarity politeness. The low percentages of the distribution, however, show that both groups did not quite favor this use when making requests to their professors. As Murray (1995) points out, phatic, formulaic openings in computer-mediated communication are optional; "users quite often launch straight into their request or content, without any of the usual conventional phatic communication, a characteristic of a conversation that focuses on transactions rather than interactions" (p. 83). The data collected in my study, particularly the AS data, support her claim, which will be discussed later.

Closings

There were only two types of closing features found in the TS and AS e-mail data: thanks and complimentary closes. Table 2 presents the distributions of these two features.

Table 2. Textual features of e-mail closings

	TS data (60 e-mails)		AS data (54 e-mails)	
	N of e-mails	%	N of e-mails	%
Thank	44	73%	42	78%
Complimentary close *(e.g., sincerely, regards)*	32	53%	12	22%

Probably because all the e-mail data were composed for request purposes, they ended with thanks in most cases. The formulaic, routine expressions such as 'thank you (very much)', 'thanks a lot', or 'thanks again' occurred very frequently in both TS and AS data. Most of the thanks found in the e-mails did not explicitly indicate for what reason to give thanks except for a few AS e-mails where either '*thank you for your time*' or '*thank you for considering this request*' was stated. It seemed that the use of thanks did not contain too much politeness value in e-mail; hence, it had only a phatic, rather than strategic, function, and more importantly, it served as a closing device in the e-mail communication.

As for the use of complimentary closes such as *'sincerely'* or *'regards'*, the distributions showed that the TS group tended to use this epistolary form more often than did the AS group.

just as shown in the case of using the salutation '*Dear…*' for the opening. However, a distinct difference in the use of these two forms for the TS group was the reason for using them. As discussed earlier, the use of the salutation was regarded as a deference politeness strategy because it was associated with high-imposition, high-distance requests. The use of complimentary closes, on the other hand, tended to be a personal preference for the TS group as well as for the AS group, because this use was not affected by situational factors of the requests.

Summary

The above findings show that these opening and closing e-mail textual features were not used in the same ways by the TS and AS groups. Not only did the distributions of the features differ, but the functions of using these features differed as well. For the TS group, they used formal address terms and the salutation to show deference politeness, but they used self-introduction emphasizing their nonnative, newcomer identity as a specific requesting strategy to enhance the likelihood of having professors comply with their requests. For the AS group, they could use first names or last names to address professors to show either solidarity or deference politeness; either way was considered polite, but the use was determined by social distance (i.e., familiarity) with the professors that they made requests to. Other features tended to be personal choices and did not possess much politeness value for the AS group.

Intertextual Analysis of Three Types of Academic Requests in E-mail

Three common academic request types, ordered from the least serious to the most serious FTA, were chosen for a detailed intertextual analysis. Each request type differs in discourse organizational patterns to some extent in both TS and AS data. Moreover, another interesting thing to look at is what speech acts were used as supportive moves and what effect these moves produced. Discourse styles and request perspectives will also be discussed through the textual features of various genres.

Type 1: Requesting an Appointment

This type of requests includes two essential parts: 1) asking for an appointment itself, and 2) asking about the time that is convenient for the professor. As shown in the TS samples, these two parts were placed at the end of both messages (see the underlined sentences), while in the AS

samples, they were placed right at the beginning of the messages. This distinction in organization immediately made these two cultural group's requesting styles differ from each other.

Sample 1: (TS)

Dear Dr. K,

I am W.C., an international student in your EPSY xxx class. Because I have a class before our class and have to catch the bus after class, I can't talk to you after the class. Therefore, I sent you this e-mail message.

I am in EPSY department now and I want to continue my PH.D in America. I am interested in child conception development. Since you teach child development and were a research associate at the Child Research and Study Center for years, I think you are the most appropriate person to give me some advice. I got the Spring 2000 schedule of classes and found out that there is only one course related to children: EPSY xxx by Dr. V, I think I will take it. Besides, you will teach EPSY xxx next semester. Will the course also focus on child or something else? I need some advice about choosing which courses will be suitable for me. Can I make an appointment with you sometime next week?

Thank you.
W.C.

In Sample 1, a brief self-introduction and a reason for sending the e-mail to the professor (which was, in fact, irrelevant to the request) was given in the first paragraph. Then, in the second paragraph, two reasons from different perspectives for requesting an appointment were given at the beginning: 1) a reason for seeking advice based on the student's professional need ('continue my Ph. D. in America') and her research interest ('child conception development'), and 2) a reason for choosing this particular professor to seek advice by emphasizing his/her expertise ('Since you teach child development and were a research associate at the Child Research and Study Center for years, I think you are the most appropriate person to give me some advice'). The first reason is to emphasize why this *request* had to be made from the student's need, while the second reason is to emphasize why this *professor* was the best person for the student to make the request to. This pattern is also displayed in Sample 2: self-introduction (with more information about the student's educational background) – reason 1 (his research interest in the Non-linear dynamics system) – reason 2 (the professor's concentration in this field) – request (asking for advice and an appointment).

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Sample 2: (TS)

Dear Dr. L,

My name is C.Y. I came from Taiwan. I got MS degree in physics in Taiwan. Although I studied the Theoretical Nuclear Structure in the past few years, I want to learn something about the Non-linear dynamics system. I notice that your concentration is in this field and I'd love to work in this field too. Could you give me some suggestions about what I need to prepare to enter your group? And could you also tell me how to get an assistantship in the physics department? I would like to meet with you sometime next week to talk about these questions. Please let me know when is convenient for you to see me. Thanks a lot.

Sincerely,
C.Y.

Giving reasons is considered as a crucial requesting strategy for the Chinese native speakers in either spoken or written requests (Kirkpatrick, 1991; Zhang, 1995). A "because-therefore" information sequence is preferred in Chinese requests, which is also evidenced in many of the TS e-mail requests in English. This preferred sequence is not only a culture-specific rhetorical convention, but also a specific way of showing politeness through Chinese indirectness. It is clear that many Taiwanese students transferred their Chinese pragmatic knowledge, probably in an automatic and unconscious way, to their English use.

It is also noteworthy that the second type of reasons demonstrated in the TS samples is very unique, for they rarely occurred in the AS data. By giving this type of reasons, the professor's expertise or professional achievement will be emphasized; hence, a compliment will be given implicitly or explicitly. This is a "gift-giving" positive politeness strategy (in Brown & Levinson's term, 1987) that the Chinese native speakers often use in order to enhance the addressee's positive face (cf. Nash, 1983).

The style shown in these two samples tended to be informal and conversational. Almost every sentence started with 'I' or 'you' (and 'I' was used a lot more often than 'you') and the syntactic structure was quite simple. However, this style did not lead to shorten the institutional distance between student and professor shown in their e-mails. This is probably because their requests tended to be very writer-oriented by providing a long narrative-type of their personal reasons without trying to be connected to the professor. Though they did mention why the professor was chosen to ask for advice, the reason was still from the student's point of view. This style helped to maintain the institutional power relation between student and professor.

In contrast, the AS samples for requesting an appointment were more straightforward and

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direct. As shown in Sample 3 & 4, the students stated their request purposes immediately at the beginning of the message and then provided reasons. There is, however, a clear difference in these two samples in terms of genre and style. Sample 3 is a very typical institutional e-mail of requesting an appointment for course advisement. It conveyed a direct transactional, but not too much interpersonal, tone; the only interpersonal element shown in this message was '…which you mentioned to me recently'. The style of this message is more close to that of business letters.

Sample 3: (AS)

Dr. D,

I would like to make an appointment with you to discuss my courses and obtain the advisement numbers for the summer and fall semesters. Also, I would like to find out more about teaching EFL abroad in Moscow and China, which you mentioned to me recently. When would it be convenient for you to meet with me?

Thank you,
CG

On the other hand, Sample 4 (and so is Sample 8) is a more friendly, informal, conversational request. This style was created because of the use of the professor's first name, a number of conversational lexical items, such as 'will you be around', 'if so', and 'go about this', and especially the last sentence 'Also, the chocolates are delicious, thanks so much!', which helped to shorten the institutional distance between professor and student. These two samples are both considered polite, but in different ways. Sample 3 is an example of showing deference politeness while sample 4 solidarity politeness.

Sample 4: (AS)

K,
Will you be around tomorrow afternoon around 4:00? If so, I would like to talk to you about next semester. I am interested in examining the 'presence' of an online student with respect to gender and cognition. How does one's presence effect their grades (cognition)? I am not sure how to go about this, but think that a survey before the course begins would be a good place to start, perhaps a personality-type survey, learning style survey or something like that. I would also like to get experience with conducting a t-test, or some kind of statistical analysis. I think I will like the research more if numbers are involved!

Let me know when you would like to meet, hopefully, I will have more ideas by then too.
Also, the chocolates are delicious, thanks so much!
M

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Type 2: Requesting a Recommendation

The information sequencing pattern for requesting recommendations in e-mail is slightly different from that for requesting appointments. All the four selected samples started with a little of the students' background information to explain why the recommendation was needed. Then the request of asking the professor to write a recommendation was stated. After that, more detail about the form and content of the recommendation was provided. A general scheme for this type of requests is like this: explanation (background information) – request (asking for a recommendation) – details of request (how and what to write the recommendation). However, there were a couple of differences that could be found in the TS and AS samples.

First, the length and the ways of giving explanations. Though the way to convey request intention in Sample 5 (TS) was as straightforward as in Sample 7 & 8 (AS), it was not the case in Sample 6 (TS). Comparing Sample 6 with the other three, we can see that the first paragraph in Sample 6 seemed to be additional. If this paragraph were taken away, the message would seem still clear in terms of request intention. However, this paragraph did increase some politeness values. It helped to establish a good connection to the professor by mentioning a research project developed in his/her course. In addition, the writer also expressed her appreciation of the professor's input to her proposal, which is certainly another positive politeness strategy (like complimenting, as mentioned earlier) used to enhance the professor's face. While doing so, the writer also elevated her own face by emphasizing that she was 'thrilled' about presenting her project soon in a conference. Here we see an example of how both the addresser's and the addressee's faces were attended to and elevated as well. Moreover, in this paragraph, we find that 'I' and 'you' occurred in single sentences several times, such as 'Do you remember I …', 'I really appreciate that you …', and 'Did I tell you …', which helped to shape an involved relation and thus, shorten the distance between the writer and the professor. Though this paragraph offered a peripheral explanation to the request purpose, it did help achieve solidarity politeness and may serve as an effective requesting strategy as well.

Second, the moves used for supporting the requestive acts. In the TS samples, gift-giving strategies such as complimenting ('I still feel it's on of the best courses I have ever taken' in Sample 5) and showing appreciation to the professor ('I really appreciate that you gave me a lot of input for that research proposal' in Sample 6) were used, whereas in the AS samples imposition-minimizing strategies were employed, such as letting the professor decide on the time

('If you feel comfortable doing this, please let me know the date and time you will be available so that I might arrange my time slot to meet yours' in Sample 7) or on the form and content of the recommendation ('Really, K, all of this is up to you – whatever you are comfortable with' in Sample 8). Gift-giving strategies help to satisfy the addressee's wants and promote his/her self-image, while imposition-minimizing strategies reduce the threat of the requested act and give the addressee some freedom to do the act in their own ways. It is noteworthy that these two cultural groups used different types of supportive moves to achieve politeness.

Sample 5: (TS)

Dear Dr. C:

This is C.C., how are you recently ? I was your student in the xxx class last semester. Now I'm planning to apply for the ph. D. tudy in our department. I want to ask if you can be one of my references and write a recommendation letter for me. I got an A in your class and I still feel it's one of the best courses I have ever taken. If you are willing to be my reference, please let me know and maybe we can find out a time to discuss about the details further. You can contact with me by either sending me an e-mail or calling me in my lab on daytime at xxx. I'm looking forward to hearing message from you. Thanks for your help.

Your student,
CC

Sample 6: (TS)

Dear Dr. M,

This is H.C. I took your EPSYxxx last fall. Do you remember I wrote a research proposal on xxx? I really appreciate that you gave me a lot of input for that research proposal. Did I tell you that proposal has been accepted by the xxx Conference? Now this research project is almost finished and I'll present the paper in xxx next May. I'm really thrilled about this opportunity.

Now I would like to apply for GSO travel grant for the conference paper presentation. They ask each applicant to provide two faculty evaluations about the applicant's project. I was wondering if you could write an evaluation for me. I include my summary of the project in the attachment for you and you can know what I have done now. If you can write an evaluation for me, I will mail the evaluation form to you (I also include the evaluation form in the attachment, but I will mail you one form signed by my name). Would you please tell me where I should mail this form to? Since the deadline is Dec.20, I have to hurry the application work. Could you please respond to me very soon?

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Best regards,
HC

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Sample 7: (AS)

Dr. K,

I am applying for an English Teaching Fellowship, which is sponsored by xxx in xxx. The application requires that I submit two letters of recommendation that comment on my abilities as an ESL/EFL teacher. I respectfully request a letter of recommendation from you and at the same time recognize that you might want to see me in front of an ESL classroom. My dates for teaching Beginners class during March are 14, 15, 16, 21, 23, 28 - time: 7:15-8:45. There are dates beyond March but the sooner I submit my application, the better. If you feel comfortable doing this, please let me know the date and time you will be available so that I might arrange my time slot to meet yours.

As an added observation, I am planning to use "Interchange" for the first three dates - which truly turns me into a facilitator. I guess I am still dealing with the teacher-as-lecturer vs. teacher-as-facilitator.
JB

Sample 8: (AS)

S,

I have been applying to schools for the 2000-2001 school year, so I need to update my credential file. Would it be possible for you to write me a reference letter? I do not have a special form for you since I have decided to keep an open file. I use to have a closed file, but many of my letters ended up lost, damaged, etc. (bad experience). So, just a regular letter would do. It would be helpful to me if you would highlight the technology insight I have gained (as you know from the classes I have taken with you--all 3!), perhaps the presentation at RPI, and any other comments you have about your interactions with me over the past couple years. Oh, contact information (it is likely that someone may want to call you) somewhere would be good too, if that's okay with you. Really K, all of this is up to you--whatever you are comfortable with.

So far, I have applied to xxx Elementary Schools. It looks I have a great shot at teaching 1st grade next year with two other new teachers. One of the principals there invited me to explore the elementary schools a few weeks ago. Before I got there he had made contact with his other "principal buddies" and then introduced me to them while I was there. They are very interested in the fresh outlook on technology and literacy I would bring the school. I shared Bob's taxonomy and your work on the standards for technology. I have also applied to xxx City School District. As you can see, my husband and I are interested in moving North.

Well, I better go. Thank you for writing me a letter. You have made a tremendous impact on my professional growth. I have thoroughly enjoyed learning from you.
FE

Type 3: Requesting a Special Consideration or Arrangement

This type of requests are those asking the professor to make exceptions to institutional rules. In these cases, as contrasted with the cases that do not have such request goals, the students

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usually do not have the same level of expectation that the professors would comply with the request. In fact, the students may also not truly have the right to make such a request. As a result, the student may resort to more various requesting and politeness strategies to help them achieve such request goals.

This type of requests differed from the other two types in organizational structure. The four samples all started with a self-introduction probably because the requests were written to the professors who did not know the students. Then the following text fits Hoey's (1983) "situation – problem – solution – evaluation" structure, where a request for action corresponds to the 'solution' part. As McCarthy & Carter (1994) notes, "In the problem-solution pattern, the key element that marks the completion of the pattern is a positive evaluation of at least one of the possible solutions offered" (p. 55). The biggest difference between the TS and AS samples is the length and the way of stating problems, just as the case of giving explanations in the second type of requests.

In Sample 9, after the writer gave a brief self-introduction, she stated the problem of being turned down by the communication program due to her TOEFL score that did not meet the requirement. Therefore, she proposed two solutions to this problem. The first solution, improving her English, was already put into action by her ('The reason why I am here for studying IELP at level 4 is to strengthen my English language ability.'), whereas the second solution, a request for reconsidering her application to the program ('I also would like to seek for a chance whether I can get admitted in communication graduate study for the fall 1999'), needed to be granted by the professor. In order to increase the possibility of achieving her request goal, she provided a series of evaluation to emphasize her work experience and other work-related abilities that equipped her with a better qualification for being admitted. Finally, she re-stated her request for reconsidering her case and also asked for a meeting with the professor regarding this issue. Though this problem-solution pattern seemed to be followed quite well in the TS sample, an interesting thing to note in this message is that the pronouns 'I' 'my' 'me' were used throughout the first paragraph but 'you' was not used even once, which made this paragraph turn into a writer's personal narrative and seemed to impair the persuasive force. Again, this is a typical Chinese approach of indirectness, which does not explicitly state that the addresser needs the help from the addressee until the end.

Sample 9: (TS)

Dear Dr. K,

My name is Y. C. coming from Taiwan. I am studying Intensive English Program (IELP) at the University at Albany-SUNY this summer. I have applied for the graduate program in communication for the fall semester at the beginning of this year. As my TOEFL results are not good enough to meet the requirement of graduate study, I have been turned down. The reason why I am here for studying IELP at level 4 is to strengthen my English language ability. And I also would like to seek for a chance whether I can get admitted in communication graduate study for the fall 1999. Although not having high TOEFL score, I have possessed 7-year work experience as a media representative working with Forbes Magazine, The Economist, New York Times, TNT & Cartoon Network as well as some airlines' in-flight magazines/videos in Taiwan, among others. Due to my job's trait, I had to face such many various accounts that I am interested in communication skill. Besides, I also needed to deal with publications' publishers who speak English language only. I expect of myself to possess more powerful ability to help my job. Speaking fluent English is essential for me; not only is English a worldwide language, but it is a communication tool. That is why I would like to major in communication.

May I request a meeting with you and re-examination for my application? I am preparing the TOEFL test and expect to get a higher score. Your reply by return e-mail at your earliest convenience will be very appreciated.

Sincerely yours,
YC

In Sample 10, a similar approach was used, but this writer gave a general statement ('I am sorry to bother you but I really got some questions and hope to get help from you') in the beginning. This statement functioned as an abstract; however, it needs to be noted that this abstract only showed that the writer needed some help from the professor, but did not tell what the request was at all. The real request occurred at the end of the second paragraph ('I wrote this e-mail to ask you some information about transferring to the linguistic anthropology program.'); still, it was an indirect approach that was employed in this sample, and the abstract only served as a deference politeness strategy.

The second paragraph (except for the last sentence) of Sample 10 clearly displayed a narrative genre. The writer described her story, i.e., how she decided what to major in for her master degree, in a chronological way. Her story included all four elements delineated in the 'problem-solution' structure, but since she rejected her initial solution (majoring in education) and then turned to her second solution (majoring in linguistics), the organizational scheme for this text can be expanded like this: situation – problem – solution 1 – reject (based on negative evaluation) – solution 2 – positive evaluation. However, the second solution was not put into action yet because it required the professor's help, and therefore, a request needed to be made to

the professor.

Sample 10: (TS)

Dear Professor H,

This is K.C. from Taiwan, a new international graduate student in the department of education. I am sorry to bother you, but I really got some questions and hope to get help from you.

When I was in Taiwan, I thought a lot about what to major in for my master's degree. I hesitated between education and linguistics for a long while.... Finally, I choose education as my further study because I was not challenging enough that time.(I am not looking down on the field of education, but I think the reason I choose it to be my major is not for interest, but frankly speaking, I do it for I think educational program is easier to get into.) After I really got here and started studying in educational program, I took some classes in TESOL program. But after a few weeks, I found that the most interesting part in the classes I take is the theoretical part about linguistics, sometimes related to language and social concerns. Therefore, I started to think thoroughly what's the subject I really feel interested in, then I recalled how much fun I had gotten in the linguistic classes I took when I was still a undergraduate student in Taiwan.... then I decided to do something for myself. After all, the reason I came to the United States for studying is not only "being an independent thinker", but I hope I can really learn something I feel interested in and do more research about it. Therefore, I wrote this e-mail to ask you some information about transferring to the linguistic anthropology program.

I know it's not that easy to get the permission to study in your program. But once I know certainly what's the thing I want to pursue, then I will just go for it. Sorry for bothering you, and waiting for your reply.

Sincerely,
KC

In fact, this message displayed two problems: one was how to decide on her major, and the other was how to make her hope of changing a major realized. The second paragraph was composed to describe her first problem and the solutions to that problem. And then, the whole second paragraph served as a positive evaluation for a possible solution (i.e. a request for the possibility to transfer to the linguistic program) to her second problem, which could account for why a long narrative was given before the real request.

Although in this type of requests the students had not contacted the professors that they wrote requests to, they got to know the professors in different ways. It seemed that the TS students found which professors they should ask for help by themselves, while in the AS samples the students got a suggestion about who to ask for help from another professor. Therefore, in the beginning of Sample 11 & 12, both writers mentioned who suggested them contact this particular

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professor, which helped build the initial connection with the professor. They followed the 'problem – solution' scheme very well. First, the writer's situation was briefly described, and then, the problem was clearly stated ('My dilemma is that I need to finish the program by Feb 1, 2002 in order to receive my permanent certification, and I'm not finding the program schedule to be very teacher-friendly' in Sample 11; 'Your research was mentioned to me by Prof. W, but your book, xxx, is out of the Library' in Sample 12). After the stated problem, a possible solution (i.e., a request regarding their particular problem) was given right away (e.g., 'Would you consider letting me do my actual field experience over the summer and receive credit in the fall?' in Sample 11; 'I was hoping that you would be able to meet with me for a brief interview' in Sample 12). Then, a series of evaluations were provided to support the necessity of the request.

Sample 11: (AS)

Dear Dr. L:

I need assistance and Professor M suggested that I contact you. I am currently teaching xxx full-time and pursuing my Masters in TESOL. My dilemma is that I need to finish the program by Feb 1, 2002 in order to receive my permanent certification, and I'm not finding the program schedule to be very teacher-friendly.

Would you consider letting me do my actual field experience over the summer and receive credit in the fall? I'm in the non-certification track, so I don't need to do student teaching. I observed at the xxx (school) in xxx last semester for my ETAP xxx class. The teacher there told me that their enrollment skyrockets in the summer and she actually was interested in seeing if I could help out.

Dr. L, I am a very serious student. I am 15 hours into the program and have a 4.0 average. I would not let you down if you were to allow me this flexibility. Dr. Z and Dr. K were the professors for my methods courses the last two semesters. I believe that they would vouch for my work ethic and ability. Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,
VM

However, the two samples showed that the evaluations were done very differently. In Sample11, we find a self-promotion in the third paragraph. The writer emphasized that she was a serious and straight A student; in addition, she also mentioned the names of the other two professors who could vouch her performance and ability. By doing so, the writer promoted her own self-image and thus, increased the impact of the request as well as the likelihood of the success of the request. In Sample 12, an imposition-minimizing strategy was used. After the request of having an interview with the professor was advanced, the writer immediately

minimized the threat of this request by providing the professor with another less threatening option using a conditional clauses ('… but if this is more difficult to schedule, I figured that this could be accomplished via e-mail'). Moreover, the writer also used lexical understaters such as 'I have *only a few* basic questions' to reduce the seriousness of the questions. Finally, the writer repeated his request in the last paragraph and also used a complimenting strategy ('I'm sure whatever you can contribute will benefit my paper') to increase the impact of the request.

Sample 12: (AS)

Prof. P,

My name is S. L. I am a graduate student in the TESOL department and I am currently writing a paper on the use of thematic instruction to promote emergent literacy in a second language. Your research was mentioned to me by Prof. W, but your book, xxx, is out of the Library. I was hoping that you would be able to meet with me for a brief interview, but if this is more difficult to schedule, I figured that this could be accomplished via e-mail. I have only a few basic questions. I was wondering what specific concerns were expressed by the teachers in your research regarding thematic instruction. Also, what was some of their criteria for theme selection? What benefits did they see with regard to literacy development? What, if anything, was discussed about thematic instruction for non-native speakers?

It would be great if you could respond to these questions via e-mail, or if you would prefer to meet me personally, I can be reached through e-mail or at xxx. Thank you very much. I'm sure whatever you can contribute will benefit my paper.

Sincerely,
LD

Requestive Acts

The linguistic realization of requestive acts shown in the TS and AS e-mail data did not differed in the choice of syntactic structures, but in the use of internal modification features. All the data showed that the Query Preparatory (e.g., 'Could you give me some suggestions about…?' 'Would it be possible for you to write me a reference letter?') and the Want Statement structure (e.g., 'I would like to make an appointment with you.') were mainly used for the requestive acts. Also, if-clauses were used very often either served as a condition (e.g., 'It would be helpful to me if you would highlight…') or an indirect question (e.g., 'I was wondering if you could write an evaluation for me.').

However, the difference between the TS and AS data was that the AS data contained more internal modification features used in their requestive acts to mitigate the impositive force of the

act. The most frequently used features were past-tense modal verbs (e.g., 'would', 'might', and 'could') and modal adverbs (e.g., 'possibly', 'perhaps' and 'maybe') used as downtoners. In addition, past progressive forms (e.g., 'I was wondering…' and 'I was hoping…') were also used quite often to suggest less direct, less definite, but more 'distant' from immediate reality and therefore more polite (Swan, 1995). A few lexical items were also use to add politeness value: the adverb 'respectfully' used in a student's requestive act: 'I respectfully request a letter of recommendation from you…' showed deference politeness, whereas the formulaic expressions 'it would be great / wonderful / helpful if you could…' showed solidarity politeness.

One of the reasons why the TS groups did not use as many internal modification features as did the AS group is probably because this use requires more sophisticated English skill and the TS group might not really know how to use these features since English was their second language, but another important reason associated with their perception of indirectness and politeness, under the influence of Chinese culture, cannot be ignored. In Chinese, external modification is considered mandatory to achieve politeness, but internal modification is not (Zhang, 1995). As we can see from the TS samples, they did use external modification (i.e., a series of other speech acts served as supportive moves) very often in their English requests to increase the politeness value and the likelihood of having their requests granted by the professors. Therefore, it was possible for them to *choose* to use external, rather than internal, modification features for their requestive acts because external modification was more natural for them to use for the politeness purpose.

Discussion

From the above analyses, we do find that the Taiwanese students and the American students, in general, used different discourse strategies to structure their e-mail requests to professors. They also varied their choices of strategies depending upon their perception of the power relation with the professor, the familiarity with the professor, and the purpose and the imposition level of the request upon the professor. Though the twelve samples I have used above cannot represent how all Taiwanese overseas students and American students compose their institutional requests in e-mail, the tendencies of using certain discourse organizational patterns and textual features that each cultural group displayed in their e-mails are worth noticing.

As Fairclough (1995) views, language use is social practice, and therefore, language production, either spoken or written texts, is both "socially shaped and socially constitutive" (p.

131). He further points out that "language use is always simultaneously constitutive of (i) social identities, (ii) social relations and (iii) systems of knowledge and belief" (p. 131). Following his theory of language use, we can provide explanations to account for why the Taiwanese students used the discourse strategies and styles that deviated from those shown in the American students' e-mail requests.

I. Social identities

Their nonnative, socially marginalized, and newcomer identity made them employ some strategies such as emphasizing their nationality and newly admitted status at the beginning of the e-mail message to get more attention from the professor. This status-stating strategy might better help them achieve their request goals because such identity qualified them to have a legitimate right to make certain requests such as asking for institutional information about their program/department or asking for advice about their new coursework. Also, their perception of the role of the student as a lower-status, powerless figure in the university context made them follow deference politeness most of the time. The most distinct discourse feature is the pervasive use of formal address terms to name their professors.

II. Social relations

The Taiwanese students, under the influence of Chinese culture, usually perceive the professor as an authoritative, higher-power role. This perception shaped a power relation with and a respectful distance from the professor. Unlike their American counterparts, their e-mails usually revealed a deferential, rather than solidary, relation with the professor. Also, their e-mails tended to be writer-oriented and generally contained fewer involved, interactional discourse features such as the pronoun 'you' and conversational language. They normally used more deference politeness strategies to show respectfulness to their professors. Though they often employed a gift-giving strategy, such as giving compliments or showing appreciation, to elevate the professor's face, the purpose of this strategy seemed not to build 'in-group' membership but to emphasize the important role that the professor played in their requestive events.

III. Systems of knowledge and belief in Chinese

These Taiwanese students had lived in Taiwan for over twenty years and received formal education there; therefore, it is very natural for them to apply Chinese cultural knowledge and values, including Chinese politeness and rhetorical conventions, to their English language use in the U.S. The TS e-mail data clearly demonstrated a transfer from Chinese rhetoric and politeness

strategy to their request making in English. The most obvious transferred strategy is a delayed introduction of request intention. The often provided lengthy reasons or explanations for the request first and also did some facework at the beginning by giving compliments or showing appreciation. That is, they employed a series of other speech acts as supportive moves prior to the requestive act in the whole requestive event. This inductive information sequencing often turn their request messages into personal narratives, rather than transactional, expository texts, which may probably reduce the persuasive force of their requests, but on the other hand, this discourse organization helped to enhance the politeness value because an indirect way of requesting was created in this way. Based on the Chinese culture, politeness through indirectness is often achieved at the expense of direct, transactional purposes. Then, in turn, politeness can be used as a requesting strategy; that is, because the addresser is polite, the addressee will more likely comply with the request. This way of making requests in the TS data deviated distinctively from that shown in the AS data.

If we agree that language use is always socio-culturally determined and all texts are socio-cultural products (Fairclough, 1995), we cannot blame the Taiwanese overseas students for not following the requesting strategies and discourse styles that the American English native speakers usually use in their requests. Even though they had learned English in their country for at least seven years and were taught the English way of text organizing, their English language use must still be under deep influence of their Chinese culture; therefore, they probably unconsciously and automatically applied their native language use to their second language use. It is understandable that their L2 discourse practice will differ from that done by native speakers, but the point is to understand the difference, not to judge it. As Purves (1988) points out, international students do not write in the way that the native speakers expect since they have learned ways of organizing in their own culture that do not match the standards of the target language. Therefore, he claims "what they wrote was not necessarily wrong, but it was different" (p. 9). Here I would like to follow Faerch & Kasper's (1989) position for interlanguage research by operating with "a *difference* hypothesis rather than a *deficit* hypothesis, i.e., describe and explain interlanguage communication, rather than evaluate it" (p. 246). The purpose for doing cross-culture communication or interlanguage research should always be to get more insight about the nature of the communication from multi-cultural perspectives and to develop a better understanding of why people communicate in different ways.

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